

One Degree of Separation: Social Media

In 1993, I saw a movie that many of you will have seen, "Six Degrees of Separation". It was a fun movie about how everyone is, at most, six steps away from any other person on Earth, so that a chain of a-friend-of-a-friend statement can be made to connect any two people in six steps or fewer. It sounds pretty magical doesn't it? Then I wondered what would one degree of separation would be like.

After seeing the movie, I came back to my office and asked my staff if there was a way to create one degree of separation between ourselves and prospective clients. We investigated various people we wanted to make contact with and chose a high net worth individual and a CEO of a large corporation. Once our two prospects were identified, we developed a plan and a series of action steps to follow.

First, we tried to learn as much as we could about our two potential prospects. We attempted to discover political, religious, social and business affiliations. Then we looked at our current client base and tried to find clients with similar interests or persuasions as our two prospects. Once we identified similarities, we endeavored to take it one step further by determining if our clients belonged to the same public organizations, or had other similar affiliations.

This was a very laborious task since the web was in its infancy, and Google and Yahoo were not the lucrative resources they are today. But we were successful in being able to get ourselves within one degree of separation from one of our prospects. *Shazam!*

Now given how hard it was to develop that one prospect, if we were going to employ this same strategy on a grand scale we would have very little time to sell planes! So we went back to running ads of our inventory and hoping prospects would find us based on those ads.

Now jump ahead to today and guess what has happened: Social Media. Wikipedia defines social media as "media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques." Social media use web-

based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues... A common thread running through all definitions of social media is "a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value."

We now have our one degree of separation. Through the use of the web-based technologies we can now actually get one degree away from a prospect.

Don't get me wrong, it still takes work. You have to be dedicated to the process and continually work at growing your network of followers. You must also be willing to work with the various web platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *LinkedIn*. In addition, you need to continue to develop and update your own websites, along with creating your own blog in order to develop networking actions that drive people to them.

Believe it or not, LinkedIn has become the second most effective way that people come to our website. Writing blogs and sending out 'tweets' to followers lets them know of a new listing or a new blog. Take the time to review other aviation and financial blog sites, adding comments to them that then link those following the other blogs to your own blogs, thus creating the value connection you have been looking for all along - your one degree of separation.

On the road to the development of the social media phenomenon was, of course, the direct mail piece, which should still have a place in your marketing efforts today - especially for those folks not yet linked into the social network.

This approach to creating one degree of separation has been categorized by many an uninterested recipient as 'junk mail'. For on the day that everyone receives the card, most are discarded. However, there may be one recipient that says, 'perfect timing, today is the day I need this offering or service'. Thus we have been successful in gaining one new prospective client.

There followed emailing, which is still, of course, a very effective method of communicating quickly and inexpensively to a large number of people. However, to the uninter-

ested recipient it is categorized as 'spam', and without a relationship connection recipients can often feel overwhelmed and angry with the high level of emails coming their way.

They too often hit the unsubscribe button and are lost forever to your attempts to reach them. So in order to achieve one degree of separation, it requires a communication partnership developed over time with someone that has chosen to opt into a relationship with you, instead of through quick, impersonal communications with someone you have merely just identified as someone you want to target.

Developing partnerships are so much easier to forge with the help of social media platforms. Now when I send an email to someone it can truly be relevant in meeting the specific need of the person I am sending it to. Having followers to your blogs, forums, and Twitter messages means they are true opt-in participants.

What if today you had an offering or service that you absolutely knew 25 people needed? Then you could just direct those 25 emails or post cards to those that would be glad to receive the information. These are the relationships we are all striving to create, and where the real value lies.

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